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Business leaders hear climate talk

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Lawyer: Local environmental efforts useless

Any action Kansas takes on its own to cut greenhouse gases is futile environmentally and harmful economically.

That was the word from environmental lawyer and nationally known speaker and writer Tom Mullikin.

He spoke Wednesday to a crowded hall full of business and political leaders from across the state. The talk was sponsored by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce.

Mullikin said he takes great pains to walk the tightrope through the middle of the politicized debate over global warming.

"I just try to lay out the facts," he said.

Mullikin avoided the touchy scientific issue of whether man-made greenhouse gases really drive up temperatures. Instead, he devoted his talk to criticizing past and present solutions.

First, he said, the impact of human activity on global warming may be less than some people make it out be.

Humans presently generate 5.5 percent of the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, he said, citing a federal Energy Information Agency figure. The rest come from natural sources such as animals and volcanoes.

Kansas homes, factories, cars, livestock and power plants, he said, contribute just 0.013 percent of all greenhouse gases floating in the world's atmosphere.

Mullikin didn't talk about how much that 5.5 percent will grow in the future, but acknowledged later that levels are expected to rise sharply.

One thing is crystal clear, he said: Any kind of local or national effort to curb greenhouse gases is worse than useless.

Europe and the United States have reduced or slowed the growth in greenhouse gases, in part because much industry has moved to places such as China with no regulations.

China recently overtook the United States as the largest producer of greenhouse gases.

"If your leadership simply moves emissions from the state of Kansas to China -- that's not leadership," he said.

A more recent solution, the cap-and-trade system, also has major flaws, he said.

The cap-and-trade system is where government sets limits for emissions. Companies that produce relatively little greenhouse gas can sell the right to produce more to heavy producers. That gives companies a financial incentive to reduce emissions.

The National Association of Manufacturers said a recent cap-and-trade proposal in Congress would cost the average Kansas family \$304 a year, as oil, electricity and natural gas companies pay higher fees, he said.

All of those fees will cost 36,000 jobs over the next two decades, the analysis showed -- all without reducing global emissions unless China and others agree to curbs.

Mullikin pointed to some solutions: increased conservation and alternative energy through new technology, but developed only through market forces, rather than by government action.

It was a message many at the session wanted to hear.

Melvin Neufeld, the Speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, who spent much of last session fighting for a coal plant in western Kansas, was at the talk and said it agreed with what he had heard last spring.

The owners of the coal plant promised to use new technology to mitigate its greenhouse emissions.

"The whole argument that coal would be a terrible thing for an environment was wrong," Neufeld said.

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